

Sister Deborah Humphreys, SC
Entered eternal life on December 3, 2024

If you've had the opportunity to read her obituary, you know how Deborah's years of active ministry exemplified the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul and the legacy of our beloved founder, Mother Mary Xavier. As a college student, Deborah served migrant farm workers near her home in South Jersey. That led to her fluency in Spanish, which she used as a social worker in Newark, the South Bronx, the *loisaida*, and then once again back in Newark at the Ironbound Community Corporation. Her obituary notes that during her first stint in Newark she founded and directed *El Club del Barrio* in Saint Columba parish. The south Broad Street neighborhood was tough – arson, prostitution, drug dealing, gangs and gun fights – but Deborah empowered the people of that neighborhood to tackle those issues by bringing them to the attention of the authorities in city and county governments. With the other Sisters who lived in Saint Columba then, she and the families cleaned up the neighborhood through sheer persistence.



“Join the convent and see the world!” Deborah's father said to her long ago. Deborah visited our sisters in Bolivia, Puerto Rico, El Salvador and Mexico and, once again, her fluency in Spanish served her well. But in the last quarter-century she traveled to Ireland and fell in love with its culture, its language, its music and its people. She traversed Ireland from south to north and especially enjoyed her stays with Sister Noreen Holly's parents in County Kerry and her very dear friends, Molly and Junior McKinney, in County Donegal. Her embrace of Irish culture led her to take up drumming, beginning with the *bodhran*, the ancient Irish drum, and then expanding to the drums of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. Deborah made a multitude of friends at *Daltai na Gaeilge* where she immersed herself in the study of Irish Gaelic and was very proud of having withstood the scrutiny of the Irish language elders, being awarded a gold pin for her mastery of the language and recognition as a teacher.

The particular talent which she shared most generously among the Sisters of Charity was her poetry. Many of us treasured her Christmas cards and found our gatherings and prayer services enhanced by her poetry. I have to say, though, that the subtle complexities of some of her poems were completely lost on her more prosaic, literal-minded friends. Despite that, Sister Mary Dwyer, Sister Eileen Bradshaw and I faithfully attended her poetry readings, where our experiences were broadened by meeting some of the other poets, and which provided a good laugh when shared later.

In 2001 Deborah wrote a poem for the ground-breaking of Providence Hall at Saint Vincent Academy. An attendee remarked to Sister June Favata that Deborah wrote lovely poems. In Deborah's presence June said something to the effect that Deborah didn't *write* poems, but that Deborah *IS* a poet. That was high praise, indeed, coming from June and Deborah treasured it.

So, Deborah, your spirit will live on among us and as the Irish say, “May your soul be at God's right hand.” *Ar dheis Dé go Raibh a hAnam*

Sister Noreen Neary, SC

There was something so uniquely good about Deborah...as much as we all try our best to live our commitment to making God's love known in the world and can be good at it, at times wonderful, there was a goodness about Deborah's sharing this love that was special, palpable.

I knew Deborah best through the 8 years we spent together in Congregational leadership. My memories of her are deeply shaded by this goodness. I have often thought about what made her so unique.

✚ Certainly, there was her creativity

- She could see an old tree and find hope, music, and beauty; she could hear a drum and feel in its pulse years of tradition, history and ideas
- She could find connections between our spiritual history and our present reality; seen clearly in her poetry and in her Christmas cards

✚ Maybe it was her openness to people she met along the way on their, often perilous, complex journeys; openness to learning from their experiences, ideas, and situations; openness to the experience of those with mental illness, those seeking shelter and safety and struggling with immigration, migration and poverty

- She could meet one in need and see through the darkness in a situation to provide a ray of hope with practical assistance

✚ And then there was her intelligence and curiosity, her wisdom and ability to integrate experience and knowledge; her willingness to dig deep into what made others who they were; going the extra mile to understand their longings, hurts through their culture, music, language, always listening

- Such commitment drove her to study her Irish heritage and culture and language ...working on learning the language and drum music ...and her Irish community and friends especially in Esopus ...Her love of the Spanish language and Hispanic community working with their advocates to help meet social needs and obtain justice

✚ And then there was her love for people, particularly those most in need, her willingness to advocate for their basic needs, needs often shaped by their emotional devastation and or the injustice in which they were imbedded. Willingly she walked with them.

✚ Her willingness to serve the sisters and the mission – serving several years on the Southern Province Council and 8 years on the General Council. Not always easy for her who needed solitude to create.....her work reflected her willingness to get involved at a deep and meaningful level

- During our time together in leadership her positive, insightful participation on the team helped to anchor us. I could always count on her balance and insight and courage
- I clearly remember and treasure her guiding me, one day life was particularly difficult, and I was nursing my wounds, she confronted me about an incident which had occurred days earlier. "Rory, just to say, you have to heal this for the people involved and for the community...it is the right thing to do." She was courageous and correct. I am forever grateful for her intervention.

✚ Deborah's courage fueled her work and directed her poetry

✚ In the end, I would say that it was Deborah's humility and kindness, unfailing kindness, always going the extra mile to understand and to give people another chance. And this was often, in spite of her personal needs and vulnerabilities

- ✚ Sisters say about her
 - “Nice to everyone, gentle and extremely creative
 - Kind and sensitive person”

Deborah could, at times, seem oblivious to what was going on around her and yet be acutely aware of the needs of those around her and the background music of their lives

Her love of family – her dear sister and brother – she spoke of often and loved so much. And she was so proud of her niece, following her life and Veterinary studies and work with enthusiasm and interest.

Deborah treasured her faithful friendships ... most especially with Sister Noreen Neary whom she trusted completely. (And of course, Dingle and Madigan, faithful dog members of the local community). Sisters so different; a wonderful friendship. Noreen faithfully accompanied Deborah on her journey even throughout her last struggle ... visiting frequently and regularly even when Deborah was unable to respond or even know who she was.

Deborah kept her parents as treasures in her heart.... her mother suffered from dementia for decades and her father faithfully visiting daily. Deborah knew and dreaded that possibility for herself. She was grateful and proud of her father's love.

Our Sister, Deborah was a teacher, poet, social worker, advocate for those in need, musician, sister, creator of art, and faithful servant... what more can I say ... but to remember that ...there was a very special, unique goodness and kindness about our Sister Deborah.

Sister Rosemary Moynihan, SC